

# Handbook for international researchers to Sweden



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We are glad about your decision to come to Sweden and  
hope this handbook will help you in planning your stay!

Welcome to Sweden!

The information in this handbook was thought to be accurate and up-to-date in September 2006. Please report any found errors to [info@researchinsweden.se](mailto:info@researchinsweden.se). The information provided gives no right for claims or legitimate expectations of any kind. This document is continuously updated. Publisher: Mobility Centre Sweden. Editor: Eva Carstedt.

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## GENERAL INFORMATION

Sweden is situated between the Baltic Sea and the North Sea and is the fifth largest country in Europe in terms of area. Sweden has 9 million inhabitants and is a long country, measuring 1,600 km. The best known period in Swedish history is probably the Viking Age.



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## Culture and Traditions

Living and working in a new country can be challenging in many ways. The day-to-day practical matters in your new home country can turn into an adventure. Living in a new culture can be exhilarating, personally rewarding, and intellectually stimulating, but it can also be frustrating. It is one thing to visit a country, moving on when you have seen enough, and it is quite another to live there to work and function according to a different, and sometimes, mysterious set of norms.

Swedes value their independence and privacy and that is why many visitors to Swedish work-places might find it difficult to get to know Swedes. On the contrary to many other countries, you will find it quite easy to have access to top management. Casual dress is common in most work environment. Workers are entitled to at least 25 days of holiday per year. People tend to use the majority of those days during the summer.

How do modern Swedes celebrate their traditional festivities? How are Swedish traditions today? Swedish journalist Po Tidholm presents a personal selection of customs and traditions celebrated in

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Sweden today. Background information about all the holidays and customs described in the book is provided by ethnologist Agneta Lilja.

Can be down-loaded: <http://www.sweden.se/traditions> (Swedish institute)



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Photographer Nicho Södling.

## Short facts

- Area: 450,000 km<sup>2</sup> (174,000 sq. mi.), third largest country in Western Europe  
Forests: 53%  
Mountains: 11%  
Cultivated land: 8%  
Lakes and rivers: 9%  
Longest north-south distance: 1,574 km (978 mi.)  
Longest east-west distance: 499 km (310 mi.)
- Capital: Stockholm
- Population: 9 million inhabitants
- Languages: Swedish; recognized minority languages: Sami (Lapp), Finnish, Meänkieli (Tornedalen Finnish), Yiddish, Romani Chib (a Gypsy language).
- Form of government: Constitutional monarchy, parliamentary democracy.
- Parliament: The Riksdag, with 349 members in one chamber.
- Religion: 80% belong to the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Sweden.
- Average life expectancy: men 78 years, women 82 years.
- Most important export goods: Electrical and telecom equipment, machinery, passenger cars, paper, pharmaceuticals, iron and steel.
- Most important imported goods: Electrical and telecom equipment, machinery, foodstuffs, crude oil, textile products, footwear, passenger cars.

(Facts from Swedish Institute, <http://www.sweden.se>)

## Some hints to understand the Swedes ☺

- **Allemansrätten** is a unique tradition of "everyman's right". This means that you, on the condition that you do not intrude on the privacy of the owner, vandalise or litter, can hike freely in forests and fields, go swimming or boat on private water.
- **Be in time** for appointments.



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- Sweden is on **daylight saving time** like all other EU-states which means that the clock changes one hour in October and March.
- **Smoking** is not allowed in public places and not in restaurants/bars either.
- Sweden uses **summer time** like all other EU-states (clock changes in October and March).
- **Systembolaget** is the only shop where you can buy alcoholic beverages, it is closed on Sundays.
- **Tack**, thank you, is one of the most frequently used words in Swedish.
- **Take off** your shoes when entering somebody's home.
- **Queues** are common in cinemas, shops, banks, post-offices, etc. You are expected to stay in the line and not cut the queue. However, many institutions have started to use queuing tickets. Wait until your numbers shows on the display, then it is your turn.

Rosa, guest researcher from Universidad de León in Spain, says about:

**Sweden:** everybody keeps telling me that Sweden is much better in the summer and that Swedish become so different then. But I went to Sweden because I wanted to experience cold and snowy days!

**Swedish language:** they all speak English perfectly well. However, there are three compulsory words to learn for any visitor to Sweden: Hej (hello), Tack (thanks), Just det (that's right).

**Swedish people:** in the beginning they keep some distance and give an image of seriousness. They seem to be independent people. After some time the distance disappears. It is all perfect, I just wish I could stay longer. I'll be back!



More information **about life** in Sweden can be bought from the Swedish institute or from Swedish embassies.

## Media

International newspapers can be bought in various news agents. Swedish and international newspapers can also be read for free at many libraries. In large cities there are a number of free newspapers in Swedish such as Metro and City. Films on Swedish TV are subtitled into Swedish which makes it easier for international visitors to watch TV!

## Religions

Most of the population, about 85%, belongs to the Church of Sweden (Lutheran) from birth/christening. Since January 2000, the Church and the State are divided. Sweden has a large number of Free Churches as well. Members of various churches may find their own churches in the big cities.

## Research in Sweden

Research and development have had high priority in Sweden in recent decades. Sweden is one of the countries that invests the largest percentage of its Gross Domestic Product in R&D. About 4% of GDP is put on Swedish R&D, putting the country number one among the 29 countries of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) in terms of R&D investments as a percentage of GDP.

The high standard of Swedish research is internationally recognised. Independent evaluations almost consistently give high marks to Swedish researchers and show that Swedish research pursued as part of European Union common programs is of high scientific quality.

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The Nobel Prize is an international award given yearly since 1901 for achievements in physics, chemistry, physiology or medicine, literature and peace. In 1968, the Sveriges Riksbank (Bank of Sweden) instituted the Prize in Economic Sciences in memory of Alfred Nobel, founder of the Nobel Prize. Each prize consists of a medal, personal diploma, and prize amount.

<http://www.nobelprize.org>

<http://www.researchinsweden.se>

<http://www.forskning.se>



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## BEFORE COMING

### **Accommodation**

Accommodation can be difficult in big cities. Check with your host institution if they provide housing or have good contacts. Another alternative is to advertise in a local paper or put up a advert on the notice board at your work place.

<http://www.foretagsbostader.se/engelska/>

[http://www.bostaddirekt.com/scripts/eng\\_master.phtml](http://www.bostaddirekt.com/scripts/eng_master.phtml)

### **Cost of living**

To give you a brief idea of the cost of living in Sweden, the list below is presented to you. However, it is only a guide-line as the cost depends on where in Sweden you live and, of course, how you live. The list prior to change (updated in September 2006).

Beef: 70-140 sek/kg	Beer (low alcohol) 6-10 sek/33 cl	Bread: 10-20 sek/loaf	Cheese: 50-80 sek/kg
Chicken: 30-50 sek/kg	Cinema: 85-120 sek	Eggs: 2 sek/each	Lamb: 60-90 sek/kg
Milk: 8 sek/liter	Newspaper: 12 sek	Pasta: 10-20 sek/kg	Pork: 50-100 sek/kg
Rent of 2 room flat: 3-6000 sek/month	Rice: 30-35 sek/kg	Theatre: 50-400 sek	Underground in Stockholm: 600 sek/monthly ticket.
Water bottle: 5 sek/33 cl	Wine: from 55- sek/75 cl bottle*)		

\*) bought at Systembolaget, the State liquor store.

### **Currency**

The currency in Sweden is "krona/kronor", abbreviated "kr" in Swedish and SEK internationally. One krona is divided in to 100 öre. You can change money in banks and in exchange bureaus.

<http://www.forex.se>

### **Electricity**

The voltage in Sweden is 230V AC, 50Hz.

### **Mobility Centre Sweden**

The Mobility Centre Sweden gives on-line information for researchers to and from Sweden. It is a project funded by the European Commission. Your key to mobility: <http://www.researchinsweden.se>

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## ***Transportation***

The public transportation system is quite good all over Sweden. The main airport, Arlanda, is situated between Uppsala and Stockholm.

## ***Weather – clothing***

Sweden has four distinct seasons. So if you plan to come to Sweden for a year or more you will need many different kinds of clothes. It might be wise to buy the winter clothes in Sweden. The Swedish climate is positively influenced by the warm Gulf Stream which means that it might be milder than you could expect at this latitude. Sweden is a long country and the weather varies a lot during the winter from north to south.

<http://www.smhi.se/en/>

## ***Work and residence permits for EU-citizens***

Most international researchers need a work permit, either from the employment in home country or from the host institution in Sweden. The category “visiting researcher” includes postdoctoral fellows. Contact the Swedish embassy or consulate in your home country.

If you plan to stay longer than three months, you must apply for a residence permit. You may be granted the permit after entering Sweden. Necessary documents are work contract and passport (or ID card).

<http://www.migrationsverket.se> (Swedish Migration Board)

<https://www.researchinsweden.se/residence> (Mobility Centre Sweden)

## ***Work and residence permits for non-EU citizens***

Some nationalities need to have a visa before coming to Sweden. Check with the Swedish embassy in your home country. You must apply for a residence permit and work permit prior to your arrival to Sweden. The permit need to be entered in your passport. Contact the Swedish embassy or consulate in your home country.

<http://www.migrationsverket.se> (Swedish Migration Board)

<https://www.researchinsweden.se/residence> (Mobility Centre Sweden)



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## UPON ARRIVAL

### ***Banks***

Banks are normally open Monday-Friday between 9.30 -15.00. Some offices have additional opening hours in late afternoon once a week. Banks are closed on weekends. Different banks have different conditions for opening an account. You will need your national registration number to open an account.

### ***Business hours***

Quite common opening hours are Monday – Friday 10.00-18.00, Saturday 10.00-14.00. Large cities and big departments stores have more generous opening hours.

### ***Driving***

Sweden has right-hand traffic. You have to be 18 and hold a driver's licence which you must carry with you whenever you drive. Sweden has very strict rules regarding driving and drinking. The police may stop a car at any time to have the driver taking a breathalyzer test. It is compulsory for both the driver, and passengers in the front as well as back seats of the car, to have their safety belts fastened. Dipped headlights are mandatory when driving, even in day-time. Car drivers have to give way for pedestrians and cyclists.

If you have a licence from your own country, you can use it for a maximum of one year in Sweden. All cars must have a red reflector warning triangle that you can display in the street in case of an accident or breakdown. The speed-limits are 30 km/h near schools, 50 km/h in the city, on minor roads 70km/h, on other roads 90 km/h and motorways 110 km/h. Keep an eye out for elks, reindeers and other wildlife when driving in the country-side.

<http://www.vagverket.se> (Swedish National Road Administration)



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### ***Emergency***

The telephone number for fire, police and ambulance is 112. You will be asked to explain what has happened and from what number you are calling.

### ***Health and medical care***

If there is an emergency, you can go directly to an emergency ward at the closest hospital. For a medical appointment you could either contact the District Health Centre (Vårdcentral), the District Nursery (distriktssköterskemottagning) or a private clinic. Telephone numbers will be found under the blue pages in the telephone directory.

If you need a interpreter at a medical appointment, you should notify the clinic in advance.

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If you are registered with the National Social Insurance Scheme, the social insurance will pay most of the cost when receiving medical treatment.

Medical prescriptions have to be taken to a pharmacy (Apotek). In large cities there are normally some pharmacies that stay open every day of the year.

Generally there are no vaccination requirements before entry to Sweden.

## ***Insurances***

If you are an EU-citizen, entitled to social insurance in your home country, employed and salaried in Sweden, you are entitled to the social benefits from the first day of work. Members of family are included in the insurance. EU-citizens can normally prove valid insurance by bringing the European Health Card. <http://www.forsakringskassan.se> (Swedish Social Insurance Office)

If you come from other country than the EU, you should check if your home country has a mutual agreement with Sweden. Your local Swedish embassy can provide you with the current information. Contact your employer in Sweden to see what can of insurances that might provide. <http://www.kammarkollegiet.se> (the Legal, Financial and Administrative Services Agency)

If you stay less than one year and are not an EU-citizen, you have to sign a private health insurance.

Insurance of personal belongings can be bought from any company listed under "Försäkringar" in the telephone directory.



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## ***National registration number***

If you stay in Sweden for more than a year you must register with the local tax office within 7 days of your arrival. When you have registered with the local tax office you will receive your national registration number (personnummer). This consists of your date of birth (year, month, day) and four extra digitals, e.g. 440901-110x. The national registration number is used for many purposes. People are registered

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by this number and not by names at many places such as hospitals, banks and it functions like a personal identification number. With this number you can apply for an identity card at the bank.

## **News in English**

It is quite easy to find news in English.

<http://www.sr.se/international> (Radio Sweden)

<http://www.thelocal.se> (Newspaper about Sweden in English)

## **Schooling**

Schooling is compulsory between the ages of 7 and 16. There are nine grades all together. Contact your local municipality in Sweden for learning more about the schooling in your neighbourhood. The university year consists of 40 weeks (2 semesters), starting in mid-August until mid-June.



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## **Swedish language courses**

Swedish is official language and is spoken by about 9 million people in Sweden and approximately 300 000 Finnish nationals in Finland. English is the second language, so most people understand and speak English. The Swedish language belongs to the North Germanic branch of the Germanic languages, closely related to Danish and Norwegian. Depending on the location of your stay there are different options for learning Swedish while in the country. The Swedish institute offers some useful links: <http://www.sweden.se>.

Courses in Swedish for immigrants (SFI) are provided by the local municipality.

## **Taxation**

Foreign nationals, who live and are paid salary in Sweden, usually pay Swedish income tax instead of tax in their home country. Sweden has negotiated agreements with about 80 countries in order to avoid double taxation. The agreements vary considerably and information can be obtained from the tax authorities in you own country or in Sweden.

Foreign key personnel - executives, experts, researchers, and others - may qualify for special tax relief when working in Sweden. The legislation provides an additional advantage to companies who need foreign expertise for their Swedish operations. <http://www.skatteverket.se> (Swedish Tax Office)

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## ***Telephone***

When dialling abroad you start with 00 and thereafter the country code. The international country code for Sweden is 46.

## ***Television***

If you buy or rent a TV, it is compulsory to pay a licence fee. Notify the Broadcasting Corporation (Radiotjänst AB). <http://www.radiotjanst.se>.

## **MORE WEBLINKS**

### ***Information about Sweden***

<http://www.sweden.se> (the official gateway to Sweden)

<http://www.visitsweden.com> (Swedish website for travel and tourism information)

<http://www.sverigeturism.se/smorgasbord/index.html> (the shortcut to Sweden)



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